
**Issues in the
Quality of Working Life**

**A series of occasional papers
No. 4 September 1983**

Changing organizations: the quality of working life process

**Jacquie Mansell
Tom Rankin**

Reproduction rights of material from this paper should be negotiated directly with the authors. For further copies of the paper and information related to QWL please contact the information service of the Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre.

Dr. Hans van Beinum
Executive Director

Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre
Ontario Ministry of Labour

400 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1T7
Telephone: (416) 965-5958
Telex: 06219730

ISSN 0227-4426 ISBN 0-743-8649-5

Foreword

About the authors

Jacque Mansell and Tom Rankin are senior consultants with the Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre. They have consulted to public and private sector organizations in the development of joint QWL processes within both existing and greenfield settings. They also design and conduct a wide range of education events for union and management active in quality of working life.

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to this paper: other writers, our colleagues at the Ontario QWL Centre and the management and union people we have worked with over the years.

Rather than acknowledging our debt to the literature through formal references in the body of the paper, we have concluded by listing references and further readings we feel would be of value to the reader.

We are grateful for the support of our co-workers and associates at the Centre, both for the learning we have shared and for their comments on earlier drafts of the paper. A special debt is owed to Hans van Beinum whose influence is widely and deeply embedded in this work. We also thank Sheila Baumann and Pauline Hyman for their patience and skill in the typing and considerable retyping of the paper.

Finally, we acknowledge the courage and competence of the union and management people who have taken the lead in developing QWL within their own workplaces. We value the opportunity to have worked and learned with them.

Jacque Mansell
Tom Rankin

Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre
Ontario Ministry of Labour

400 University Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1T7
Telephone: (416) 965-5958
Telex: 06219730

Table of contents

1	Introduction	7
2	QWL: a definition	9
	Work organization and job design	10
3	Changing and learning: the QWL process	13
	Exploring, redesigning and sustaining	15
4	Stage one: exploring QWL	17
	Recognizing the need to consider change	17
	Approaching other parties	18
	Deciding on the use of a consultant	20
	Examining what's in it for union and management	21
	Assessing conditions required to proceed	24
5	Stage two: redesigning the organization	25
	Creating structures to oversee the process	25
	Establishing the framework and developing guidelines	27
	Allocating resources	28
	Deciding how and where to start	31
	Approaching potential participants	33
	Setting up structures for redesign	35
	Analysing the current system and implementing change	39

6	Stage three: sustaining the process	43
	Maintaining commitment	43
	Diffusing the process	45
	Establishing systems for ongoing evaluation and redesign	46
	Adapting support systems	48
	Supporting change within management and union	49

7	Concluding remarks: living with a new kind of organization	53
---	--	----

8	References and further readings	54
---	---------------------------------	----



1

Introduction

The focus of the following paper is the 'how' of quality of working life. How do we know if our organization is ready, how do we get started, how do we keep our quality of working life process alive and growing...? The paper examines a wide range of very practical questions which need to be addressed by managers, unionists and workers who are attempting to practise the principles of quality of working life.

We do not claim to have answers for all the questions we discuss, or even to have asked all the necessary questions. The paper pulls together what we and our colleagues have learned from working with a wide range of union-management QWL processes. We know that our learning is incomplete. The current growth rate of knowledge in the QWL field is tremendous. We have rewritten this paper enough times to realize clearly that it will never be 'finished.' We, therefore, want to pass it on to our readers as a kind of living document.

Despite its rather linear, step-by-step layout, the paper is not a QWL cookbook, blueprint, or set of program specifications. It is a form of guide, or map. A guide helps the traveller to understand the lie of the land—what the local conditions are like, where the twists and turns are and where they may lead, where opportunities and obstacles may exist, etc. A good guide helps people to find their own way, to learn how to travel the land themselves.

The following paper discusses the major characteristics of the quality of working life process. It points out conditions of the organization and of the change process which have been found to be important to success. It explores many of the obstacles that have been encountered by unions and management in a variety of settings. At times it even offers specific suggestions on what to do and what not to do.

We trust, however, that readers will not attempt to use our work as a rigid set of prescriptions. We have written the paper in the belief that people can work with the experiences and learnings of others in order to enrich their understanding of their own experience. In the end, every organization must learn how to create and travel its own course with quality of working life.

2

QWL: a definition

The way we define QWL determines how we see the quality of working life process. However, attempting to define quality of working life is taking a bit of a risk. There are so many definitions of QWL, and so many warnings against definition, that it is difficult to be definitive. What we offer here is our definition—the way we see quality of working life.

At its very core, quality of working life has to do with choice, values and learning. There is choice about the kinds of organizations we have in our society. The choices we make are based on what we value. Consciously or not, we create organizations which are concrete expressions of our basic values. However, individuals, groups and organizations also have the capacity to learn new ways to create new organizations which reflect the values they consciously choose to support.

Quality of working life is the concrete expression of a particular set of beliefs and values—about people, about organizations and, ultimately, about society.

People

Quality of working life states that organizations should be designed (and redesigned) to support the positive characteristics of people:

- people have the need for, and take pride in achievement
- people have the need and the ability for on-going learning
- people need continual stimulation of their mind and senses
- people are naturally social and enjoy mutually supportive relations with others
- people are purposeful; for self-esteem, they need to know that they are making a contribution of value to society
- people need freedom and autonomy and are capable of responsible self-regulation.

Organizations

In addition, in order for organizations to be effective and to survive, the fundamental characteristics of organizations must also be recognized:

- organizations cannot insulate themselves from their environment but are in a continuous two-way interaction with it. The environment of most organizations is complex, quickly changing and relatively unpredictable. The trend is toward increasing complexity
- organizations need the capacity for long-term, strategic planning at all levels
- organizations need high levels of flexibility and internal integration; they must be able to change in a variety of directions as a total system
- organizations need the ability, at all levels, to respond quickly and accurately to new, often unpredictable events. Organizations, therefore, need a workforce that is competent, adaptable and responsible.
- all organizations are made up of inter-dependent parts which can only be fully understood when they are examined in relation to one another. The technical and social systems of an organization are linked in such a way that, in order to optimize overall organizational functioning, analysis and design should focus on the relationship between the two; that is, on the total socio-technical system.

Work organization and job design

The practise of QWL is directly based on its beliefs and values. The needs of people cannot be met and the tasks of organizations cannot be performed effectively unless organizations are designed to support the above characteristics. In concrete terms, QWL means that all organization structures and processes, including jobs, should be designed to ensure that:

- decisions are made at the lowest level possible. Self-regulation for individuals and groups is a primary goal.
- individuals or integrated groups of workers are responsible for a 'whole job.' People do not work on fragmented, meaningless tasks.
- the potential (technical and social) of individuals, of groups and of the overall organization is developed to the full.
- hierarchies are minimized and artificial barriers do not exist between people or between functions

-
- quality and quality control is built directly into the primary production system
 - safety and health are built directly into the total system
 - support systems and structures promote and support self-regulation, integration and flexibility. For example, information systems provide immediate feedback directly to those who need the information in order to perform their job; information is not used to retain power or to police others
 - problems are resolved on the basis of joint control and shared responsibility between all groups. Structures and processes for the sharing of decision-making powers are guaranteed at all levels in the organization.
-

Society

Ultimately, quality of working life is concerned with the quality of life in society. At the most basic level, the overall prosperity of society depends on the effective use of its resources. Organizations that are effective and adaptable are necessary to build a society that can change and continue to prosper in today's world.

At a more complex level, a democratic society cannot be built upon non-democratic institutions and organizations. The success of democracy as an equitable system of responsible self-government rests on the development of the positive qualities of people, and on a system of structures and processes to ensure a fair distribution of power in society. Democracy believes in and is dependent upon human freedom and dignity. In order to support democracy, organizations must support the sharing of power and the enhancement of human dignity in the workplace.



3

Changing and learning: the QWL process

The quality of working life redesign of an organization is an on-going process of individual, group and organization learning. QWL is not a simple program with sharply defined goals, a clear starting point and a predetermined set of steps along the way to a target date, at which time the program will be securely in place.

Quality of working life is a set of beliefs and values which affect all aspects of the organization. Making a commitment to quality of working life means becoming active in a long-term and complex process of change. Once change begins, it is often not possible to predict exactly what will happen. The change process will build its own momentum, form and meaning as it develops.

Learning to learn

Individuals, groups and the organization as a whole must learn to understand and manage their own change. This means they must learn to work together as the situation evolves to make choices which are consistent with QWL. Since they cannot always be given precise goals, people will need to learn to explore a range of possibilities in order to choose workable objectives. In some cases, this will mean learning to work through differing and sometimes conflicting sets of interests. When people work through difficult issues together, they are not only resolving the issue at hand; more importantly, they are also increasing their own and the organization's capability to manage change.

The quality of working life process must be open and participative. It is a basic belief of QWL that democracy cannot be implemented through dictatorship. In order to learn, individuals, groups and organizations need to experience new and complex situations for themselves and to work through making their own choices. Without learning, only superficial change is possible. Although indirect, or representative participation is the most practical approach in many situations, the opportunities for learning are greatest where there is the greatest amount of active, direct participation.

Real participation means that the quality of working life process is jointly owned and controlled by all groups within the organization. It also means that all groups share responsibility for both the achievements and disappointments of the process.

The quality of working life process requires special leadership qualities and skills. Leading a complex learning process poses many challenges. Formal authority, or the power to enforce rules and regulations, is often of little help.

QWL requires leaders who are comfortable in a situation where they must ultimately be guided by values and principles. Since it is sometimes difficult in a change process to establish clear-cut goals and directions, leaders are needed who understand and are committed to the fundamental values underlying the change. Leaders must also have the ability to translate general QWL principles into concrete objectives which are sensitive to the requirements of the particular situation.

Leaders in a QWL process need to have a deep understanding of their organization. They must know its history and its culture and be in touch with the needs and concerns of its people—as individuals and as distinct groups. Leaders have a special role to play in identifying and building upon opportunities for change. They also need to provide support and guidance in working through suspicion, fear and resistance.

Living with uncertainty

Managers, unionists and workers engaged in a QWL process will run head-on into many totally new situations. They will not always have past experience as a guide; in fact, past practices will sometimes conflict with new directions. The quality of working life process, therefore, means taking risks and learning to live with uncertainty. Union and management leaders must be strong enough in their positions, and in their own personalities, to take risks and to persist through the challenges of both success and failure.

One of the most important characteristics of the quality of working life process is the fact that it is unique for each organization. Although the principles of QWL do not change, and although organizations do have much in common, successful 'QWL transplants' cannot be made from one setting to another. Ultimately, each organization must create its own response to its own special reality.

Exploring, redesigning and sustaining

The following paper is a discussion of what is common in the QWL process across different organizations. Notwithstanding the unique and unpredictable quality of QWL within any one setting, there are a number of key issues which almost always play an important part in the process.

As a rough guide, we have found it useful to look at the quality of working life process in three stages:

- exploring quality of working life,
- redesigning the organization, and
- sustaining the process.

In reality the boundaries between the three stages are blurred. For example, change in the way of doing things—that is, redesign—starts as soon as people begin to explore quality of working life seriously. Certainly, sustaining the process depends very much on how issues such as monitoring and evaluation are handled in the first two stages. We deal with the stages as separate mainly to simplify discussion.

Issues and situations

Within each stage, a variety of issues will have to be worked through in order for the process to continue to develop. Most of these issues occur in some form within all organizations. Their specific shape, however, varies from setting to setting. For example, some basic level of mutual respect and trust is needed between union and management in every QWL process. However, the amount of time and the kinds of action it will take to establish sufficient trust and respect will depend on such specifics as past union-management relations, the balance of power between the parties, the kinds of change people are considering, the personal qualities of key players, etc.

The significance of each issue will also differ from situation to situation. For example, the stability of senior management, or of the union executive, may be a major issue in one organization and relatively insignificant in another.

Although issues are discussed in the following paper in a linear series of steps or clusters within each stage, they will never occur so neatly. Like most of what happens in life, issues which need to be worked through in a QWL process rarely occur one at a time. They often come in bunches, forcing everyone to deal with several complex matters at the same time.

In addition, many of the issues within quality of working life cannot be dealt with once and then be put forever to rest. As developments unfold, old issues will re-emerge in new forms and will have to be dealt with again. For example, the original guidelines created by union and management may become inadequate, or even inappropriate, as the full nature of the QWL change emerges.

As we discussed earlier, the following paper is meant to be a guide to union and management trying to develop their own QWL process. It is not a blueprint or step-by-step 'how to' on QWL. Since quality of working life is a living thing, it is only the people who live with it from day to day who can make QWL work. Only they can grow with the process as it grows and only they can learn how to find new answers to the many questions which can never be foreseen.

4

Stage one: exploring QWL

QWL redesign should not be undertaken without a serious exploration of the meaning of change. The exploration needs to involve as many groups and individuals as possible within the organization. It also needs to be truly exploratory—a decision to proceed with quality of working life is meaningful only if there has been a real option to say no.

The process of different levels of both union and management working separately and together to make an informed choice about QWL involves a lot of gathering and sharing of information. It also involves dealing with sensitive power relationships and with differences in values and interests. It requires intelligence, openness and vision to move from the realities of the present to explore new opportunities for shaping a better future.

Recognizing the need to consider change

There are many reasons why either management and/or union might begin to explore quality of working life. The original interest might be sparked by concerns about problems within the current organization, by concerns about the organization's ability to deal with the future, and/or by the ideals of the management and union.

Either side may have concerns about problems in the current organization such as slow and distorted communications, high grievance loads, too much management time being spent fighting fires, over-supervision, etc. These problems are often serious enough to have negative effects on the 'bottom line' performance of the organization.

Shaping the future

In situations where problems do not exist (or are not perceived), it is usually more difficult to get people to consider change. People often interpret suggestions that things could be done differently as unwarranted criticisms not only of current practices, but also of their personal competence. Alternatives may be considered only if the organization is examined in relation to

possible future developments. Such things as a change in the workforce, a new technology, or a shift in market conditions can be seen as either potential problems or potential opportunities. Instead of passively waiting to react to changes when they finally hit, many organizations have begun to develop quality of working life as a way to actively shape their own future.

People are also motivated to change by their ideals. Even where the organization could survive as is, change may still be considered desirable because of a commitment to ongoing improvement both in organizational effectiveness and in the experience of work for people. Some of the basic ideals which stimulate QWL redesign are the belief in the right of people to interesting work and to participate in decision-making and the belief in the value of a highly flexible, responsive organization.

Approaching other parties

The first step is usually taken by one level of either management or union acting alone. Approaches must be made both to other levels within the initiators' own organization and to the other side. When and how the approach is made will greatly affect the development of the process.

Above all, the initial approach should be in the form of an invitation to begin an open exploration of QWL. Room must be given for all parties to have real input into and control over important decisions. No matter how it is handled, the presentation of a detailed proposal tends to imply that one party on its own has the ability and the right to define the situation and to determine what actions are needed. It also tends to force a premature narrowing of discussion by putting the second party in a reactive 'yes or no' position.

It is necessary for those making the approach to be prepared for resistance. It is important at this point to have an understanding of any opposition that might spring from the particular history and culture of the organization. In addition, leaders in a QWL process need an appreciation of and tolerance for the general fears and concerns that lie behind the opposition to change. People are often suspicious of new ideas. Fear of the unknown is common and understandable. Even if traditional ways do have their problems, they at least feel like something you can count on...better the devil you know.

Active participation

Although we all must deal with some uncertainty in our lives, changing something as central as the workplace could build this uncertainty to highly stressful levels. Within a QWL process,

therefore, it is important to manage change in a way that is sensitive to people's feelings of risk. A crucial learning here is that the best way for people to learn to deal effectively with uncertainty and risk is to participate actively in the change process themselves.

In addition, when introducing new ideas it may be useful to build upon experiences with which people are familiar. Drawing comparisons between the values, goals and/or processes of QWL and their counterparts in such things as management development, union education or joint health and safety efforts may help people to feel less uncertain about the quality of working life concept.

How far union or management should proceed internally before approaching the other side is a sensitive issue. What is needed by the initiating party is some general internal agreement that QWL is worth exploring, the ability as a group to explain their interest in QWL to the other side, and a genuine willingness to work with the other side in a joint exploration. It is not wise or practical to require complete understanding and/or agreement within the ranks before approaching the other side.

Both sides also need to recognize and be comfortable with the need to proceed with joint exploration and discussion at the same time that each side is continuing to deal with certain issues on its own. Indeed, both union and management require the kind of information available only through joint exploration before they themselves can fully examine what QWL may mean for them.

When and at what level to initiate the discussion between management and union depends on the particular situation. There are several projects which have developed successfully out of decisions made at the bargaining table. There are also cases where raising QWL during negotiations has been seen as a ploy to undermine the bargaining process. Discussions may begin at the local level between the plant manager and local union president, or at a more senior level. Ultimately, discussions between union and management at both the senior and the local level are essential.

Deciding on the use of a consultant

At all stages in a QWL process, the organization will have special needs in such areas as education, training, co-ordination and work analysis and design. The degree to which an organization already possesses expertise (i.e., knowledge, skill and experience) in these areas will partly determine its need for external assistance.

Beyond the issue of expertise, however, other considerations may be equally important in deciding on the need for an external consultant. For example, if most of the expertise within the organization is held by one side, an external consultant can help to balance the situation by providing knowledge and experience that is owned jointly by both parties. In addition, a third party may be useful in situations where, due to past relations, union and management have not yet learned to work together effectively.

Finally, a crucial element in managing any change process is the ability to stand back from day to day activities and examine what is happening from a more 'objective' position—a kind of helicopter view of what everyone is living through. This is often easier for an outsider to do.

If an external consultant is used in a project, she or he should be chosen and managed by and be accountable to union and management jointly. Who pays for the consultant may or may not be an issue depending on the situation. In any case, in order for the consultant to work effectively, everyone must be comfortable with the fact that she or he will need to work not only with union and management jointly, but also with each party on its own from time to time. This is only possible when both union and management feel confident that they do have control over the consultant.

Experts and expertise

Special care must be taken to choose the right kind of consultant. Above all, a consultant to a QWL process must understand and be comfortable with the difference between being 'The Expert' and being a facilitator. Whereas 'The Expert' tends to provide 'The Answers,' a facilitator uses her or his expertise to help people to develop the ability to find their own answers. One of the major roles of the consultant is to ensure that as the process develops, more and more of her or his functions can be handled effectively from within the organization.

At the exploration stage, the decision to use a consultant should not be seen as a commitment to QWL. The use of the consultant should be seen as a way to obtain help in reaching a more informed decision on whether or not to proceed. The people within the organization should do their own exploration of whether they need or want QWL. The kind of individual, group and organizational learning essential to quality of working life will probably not occur if an outside consultant is hired to do an independent needs analysis or organizational diagnosis. If people are expected to make a real commitment to change, they need to gather their own information, handle their own analyses and make their own decisions.

At all stages, the people in the organization need to own and manage the QWL process themselves. They must take responsibility for working through their difficulties and making their own choices. Too much dependence on the consultant will interfere with the learning which is essential in order for the process to become a part of on-going life in the organization.

However, the consultant does represent an important source of knowledge, skill and experience. The full value of this expertise cannot be realized unless it is seen as legitimate for the consultant to make recommendations and, on occasion, to challenge both parties. Such behaviour should not be seen as an attempt on the consultant's part to control the process. When it is clear that final decisions belong solely to those within the organization, then everyone can benefit by giving consideration to possibilities presented by the external consultant.

Examining what's in it for management and union

This is one of the most important issues within quality of working life. How well the parties work through their separate and shared perceptions, expectations, hopes and fears will be the key factor in determining whether they proceed at all. And if they do proceed, it will greatly shape the nature of what they do. The use of surveys and questionnaires at this stage in the process is inappropriate. They are basically passive instruments which do not encourage, or often even allow, the level of interaction and working through required for learning.

The shared vision of QWL which will emerge at this stage will affect the overall meaning of the change. It will influence not only what kinds of changes are considered, but also the way the

process is developed. It will also determine what criteria and methods are considered valid for use in judging the success or failure of the process.

The first phase in this examination is the gathering of information on the why, what and how of quality of working life. Union and management must share an understanding of the basic principles and processes underlying QWL. However, they must also go beyond general principles and develop some shared understanding of the kinds of concrete changes which might occur if the principles were applied within their own organization. Only in this way can they begin to appreciate some of the real implications of a decision to proceed.

It is important that union and management develop their understanding of QWL at an equal pace. Feelings of being manipulated or treated as second-class citizens may develop if either side gets too far ahead of the other. Proceeding at an equal pace, however, does not mean doing everything together. Although joint activities are central, it will also be necessary for each party to gather and examine certain information on its own.

One useful way of gathering information is to examine—either through readings, seminars or visits, what other companies and unions have done. People are often curious to learn about innovations that have been tried by others. Special information gathering events should be planned paying careful attention to who attends, what information needs to be collected, and how the information can be shared with the rest of the organization. For example, when looking at another organization it is important to look at both the positive and negative aspects of their experience.

Such information also needs to be used carefully. However appealing, the tendency to copy should be avoided. Although it is certainly possible to learn from the experience of others, each organization is unique and must always develop its own quality of working life.

Clarifying goals

The second phase in the examination of 'what's in it' is a working through of the meaning of the information which has been gathered. The information means nothing until it is examined against the goals and fears of all parties. The goals and fears of all levels within both union and management need to be considered. People must be able to discuss their assumptions about how a project would proceed, what they would like to get out of it and what they fear losing by it.

There can be two types of goals within workplace change programs. First, there are goals based primarily on the desire for specific outcomes: such as reduced absenteeism, quicker resolution of grievances, lower scrap rates, etc. If such goals are the major motivation for change, then the change will be handled as a 'project' which it will be difficult to sustain once the specific outcomes have been achieved.

A quality of working life process, however, is based on a different type of goal. QWL is based on the pursuit of ideals, or general principles: such as, greater democracy in the workplace and greater organizational flexibility. Although action is not possible until ideals and principles are translated into specific objectives, the nature of the specific objectives can and will change over time as changes occur within the organization and within the QWL process itself.

It is not necessary for union and management to have the same goals within quality of working life. Their goals should, however, not be in conflict. Disagreements around such issues as productivity improvement or job security must be resolved. For example, unionists who will not accept increased productivity as a primary objective of QWL will often accept improvements in organizational effectiveness as a by-product of the process.

Hopes and fears

It is not enough at this phase to examine only goals. The fears of all parties must also be addressed before a real decision can be made—either to proceed or to say no. If the fears of people are not brought into the open and discussed, they will continue to exist as an invisible source of resistance.

There are important issues for both union and management within quality of working life. Discussion of these issues should not be glossed over. For example, many managers at all levels have concerns about how QWL may affect such things as short term costs and profitability. They worry about how QWL will be viewed by such key groups as suppliers, customers and shareholders. Many managers fear they will lose power within quality of working life. Similarly, unionists at all levels often fear that their ability to achieve gains through traditional adversarial relationships will be weakened.

Fears such as these have not only a rational side, but also a deep emotional meaning for people. For this reason it is essential at this phase, and on throughout, to give people the time and space to work through their concerns, both alone and with the support of others.

The ability to work through issues on both sides in a constructive way will depend largely on the relationship between union and management. Unless each side is confident of its own power and can trust the other side not to abuse its power, fears on both sides will dominate. It will not be possible to reach the agreement required to proceed. It may be necessary at this point for union and management to take the time to work on their relationship before continuing further.

Assessing conditions required to proceed

If management and union both feel they have more to gain than to lose from quality of working life, they still need to assess whether other conditions are sufficient to proceed — remembering, of course, that conditions will never be ideal.

A QWL process cannot succeed without the commitment of both senior union and senior management. Commitment, however, does not mean unqualified endorsement of QWL; a certain amount of caution is understandable. At the local level, both parties must be confident that they have the support both of union and management head offices and of local leaders. When looking at senior union and management, it is important to assess whether they possess the kind of strong leadership qualities needed for QWL.

It is also necessary for the managers and the workers overall to be sufficiently supportive of QWL. Whether a full union membership vote is required before proceeding will depend on the particular situation. However, whatever means is used to test interest and support, neither side should require or expect a 100 per cent consensus within its ranks.

One condition that may harm the initial development of QWL is the changing of key people within management and union. When deciding whether and when to proceed, it may be useful to consider such things as planned career changes within management and the timing of union elections. However, certain changes within an organization, such as the introduction of new technologies or a management reorganization, may actually provide special opportunities for improving the quality of working life.

Finally, the development of quality of working life is not possible unless both parties are willing and able to commit resources to the process. These resources include not only money, time and people; they also include intangibles such as patience and care. In many ways, the provision of resources is the concrete illustration of real commitment to QWL.

5

Stage two: redesigning the organization

Putting the ideal of quality of working life into practice is a great challenge. The redesign stage in QWL is somewhat like adolescence and early youth. It is often a confusing, frustrating and frightening, but exciting and rewarding time. Above all, it is a learning time. It is at this stage that people really begin to understand the meaning of the process in which they have become involved.

It is not surprising that the QWL redesign process usually takes many years. Patience is a great virtue in QWL; yet it is also important not to fall into the trap of using the difficult and lengthy nature of change as an excuse against taking any actions that really challenge the existing system. In this light, adequate time and care need to be given to laying the proper groundwork for redesign. Organizational learning and change will not occur unless structures to support change are created, policy frameworks and guidelines for action are established, and resources are allocated to the process.

Once the organization moves into the redesign stage, it becomes apparent that QWL is not something that can be experimented with. When people begin to experience active participation in decisions that are important to them, they develop not only new skills, but also new hopes and expectations. When people really begin to believe, or even only to hope, that things could and should be better, then it is not possible to stop the experiment and go quietly back to the way things used to be.

Creating structures to oversee the process

In most organizations union and management establish a joint body (often called the Steering Committee) to oversee the QWL process. The functions of this body include: establishing the framework for the process by defining general principles, objectives and minimum conditions under which it will proceed; providing senior level commitment, support and sanction for change activities; and assessing the relation between QWL and

other union and management policies and practices. When establishing the Steering Committee, care should be taken to clarify the relation between it and existing decision-making structures within both management and union, bearing in mind that this relation will never be completely clear and may change as the process develops.

The above functions cannot be performed unless the right people are on the Steering Committee. Both sides should choose representatives with authority, decision-making power and influence. The most senior people from both union and management should be automatic members. At later stages, it may be necessary to include representatives from areas involved in redesign.

There are pros and cons to the question of whether the same people should be on the QWL Steering Committee as are on the union and management negotiating committees. For example, in some situations it will be important to union solidarity to have the whole union committee, or executive, on the Steering Committee. Too much overlap between the two structures, however, can have disadvantages. Using the same people for both committees does not allow others to participate. In addition, too much overlap may make it more difficult to resist the tendency to use the QWL Steering Committee as another forum to deal with issues unresolved at the bargaining table.

Equal power

Another issue is the balance of numbers between union and management. What is essential is that both parties have equal power on the Steering Committee. Whether equality of power requires equality of numbers will depend on the particular situation. For example, it may sometimes make more sense to have unequal numbers, but to give each side veto decision-making powers.

In order to perform its functions effectively, the Steering Committee needs to develop an appropriate style of operation. Above all, the style should encourage the joint identification and exploration of alternatives, rather than the adoption of fixed positions. While the method of making a final decision (for example, by majority vote or by consensus) can vary, an open-minded, flexible, approach is invaluable.

Establishing the framework and developing guidelines

As mentioned above, one of the main functions of the Steering Committee is to establish a framework consisting of general principles, objectives and minimum conditions under which the QWL process can proceed. Although the principles, objectives and boundaries will have evolved out of a much broader process involving people in all levels of both union and management, it is the Steering Committee that must take the leadership role at this point.

At the point of transition from exploration to implementation, summarizing the understandings and commitments which have developed thus far helps to bring clarity and some sense of achievement to the process. When people have to summarize what they have done, it forces them to develop some common language for their experience. It also forces them to clarify just where agreements and differences do exist. Both the process of summarizing and the final summary statement itself are invaluable for achieving the collective understanding needed for collective action.

It is important that any statement (e.g., Philosophy Statement, Letter of Agreement, etc.) be in a form that can be clearly communicated to everyone. The Steering Committee needs to be able to talk to the rest of the organization about why the QWL process exists, about what general directions it might now take and about any boundaries and/or safeguards to which union and management have agreed (for example, in relation to job security, corporate policies, the collective agreement, the sharing of benefits, etc.).

Setting a course

An issue here is how specific the Steering Committee should be in formulating guidelines. On the one hand, it needs to provide some general direction for the rest of the organization to follow. QWL is not open territory, it is not a process of allowing individuals or groups to do whatever they want. On the other hand, it would be against QWL principles themselves if the Steering Committee were to dictate exactly what other groups should, or could do.

The process guidelines should not be stated in terms of a set of precise goals (such as multi-skilled operators or workers handling their own production planning) or in terms of a list of rules and regulations. What is needed is for the Steering Committee to communicate its objectives and commitments in terms of a

clear and meaningful statement of the values and principles which it would like to see put into practice. This requires going beyond general statements about human dignity, worker involvement and organizational effectiveness.

In order to provide leadership, the Steering Committee must be ready to state its commitments to such specifics as the right of workers to develop their skills to the highest level possible, the right of people to interesting, challenging jobs, the need for decisions to be made at the lowest level possible in an organization, etc. With respect to boundaries, the Steering Committee needs to try to clarify those areas where it is ready to explore significant change and those where it is not yet prepared to move (for example, changes in work methods may be considered within the production area, but moves across crafts or between plant and office may be clearly out of bounds).

A final point about QWL guidelines—they should not be treated as if they were cast in concrete. The purpose of guidelines is to enable people to move, to provide a starting point for action. If the guidelines do not, or ever cease to fulfill this purpose, they need to be changed. The guidelines, the Steering Committee and the overall process need to be flexible enough to allow people throughout the organization to interact continually with the Steering Committee in order to reinforce, challenge and adapt the guidelines as the whole organization learns more about the meaning of QWL through actual practice.

Allocating resources

Without the allocation of the resources needed to support change, a QWL process can deteriorate into 'just another program'—a program characterised by rhetorical statements, powerless committees and a lot of disappointment, frustration and anger.

The main resources needed to support QWL are direct funds, time and, above all, people. Money may be needed to cover the cost of such things as an outside consultant or education programs (both within and outside the organization). Money will also be required if suggestions are made within the QWL process which involve changes in manpower levels, environmental conditions, the technical system, etc. A major issue here is who controls the money. Many Steering Committees have found it useful to establish a QWL budget that is jointly controlled by union and management.

A QWL process makes particularly heavy demands on people and their time. There are several reasons for this. First, leaders play a major role in any organization-wide change process. Key

people in both union and management must, therefore, be prepared to give some of their own time to quality of working life.

Line Responsibility

Second, QWL is fundamentally a line phenomenon. It is directed toward improving the basic structure of the organization and is not just something added on to improve labour-management relations, communications, or 'morale,' etc. This means that line managers and workers who are directly responsible for keeping the productive heart of the organization functioning must also become involved in the development of QWL.

And finally, since QWL is a long-term, highly participative process, it will involve large numbers of people—all of whom will require time for such things as education, training, problem-solving, etc.

The overall stress on people's time and energy can be effectively alleviated by a wise use of people with special responsibilities for the QWL process. Experience has shown that most organizations need to have people assigned, at least on a part-time basis, to provide special support to the development of the QWL process from within.

Although the specific nature of the internal resource role differs across organizations, certain issues are fairly common. In a joint process, for example, there is always the question of who controls internal resource people. The usual response to this question is either two internal people—one from management and one from the union—or one person that is chosen jointly by union and management (usually via the Steering Committee) and is accountable to the Steering Committee as a whole.

Internal leadership

The internal resource role in a QWL process is an important and demanding position. It is a mistake to treat it as a clerical/administrative role. Above all, it is a position of leadership. In order to perform the role well, a person needs technical understanding of the kinds of changes possible within QWL, good interpersonal and group process skills, training skills, strong analytical abilities, and credibility across the organization.

Time and care need to be put into finding, and usually developing, the right people for the job. Internal resource people should not be chosen until the key people in the organization have enough understanding of and commitment to QWL to make an informed choice. Internal people are often chosen too early, either because someone is needed to coordinate meetings and take minutes, or the external consultant

needs someone with whom to relate, or simply because someone is available and interested in the job.

A difficult question for internal resource people is how much to support and how much to lead the QWL process. This problem is accentuated when there are two internal people, each at least to some degree representing either union or management. How much, for example, is a union QWL resource person meant to protect the union's boundaries within the process and how much can she or he be expected to take risks and challenge the union to widen those boundaries?

Every internal QWL resource person must handle a delicate balance between being part of and, therefore, sensitive to the needs of the existing system and at the same time being in a special role where it is necessary at times to step back from the system and put pressure on it to change. One of the more useful roles of a good external consultant is in helping the internal person to handle this balance.

A different, but related issue is the possibility that the internal resource person may (usually unconsciously) try to take too much control of the QWL process, or may appear to do so. There are several reasons why this may happen. At a simple level, since QWL is their direct job responsibility, they will be understandably nervous that its success or failure will reflect on them. At a more complex level, an internal resource person usually has a high level of commitment to QWL and often comes to identify with the process on a very personal level.

An important part of the internal person's job, however, is to make sure that information and experience and, hence, learning and control are shared by as many people as possible. For example, contacts between the organization and the outside world should be handled by a variety of people. Although there is often pressure from both within and outside an organization for one person to become the 'QWL spokesperson,' the tendency should be avoided. Conscious efforts should be made by everyone to ensure that the QWL process does not become too heavily identified with any one person, but remains the property of the organization as a whole.

External support

At this point in the process, it is also useful to re-examine the use of an external consultant. What role, if any, is there for an outside person once the decision has been made to proceed with QWL? To whom would an external person now consult? How might facilitation be shared between internal and external resource people? If a consultant has been used in the exploration stage, union and management should now discuss these and other such questions openly with the consultant.

There are a number of potentially touchy issues around the use of external consultants. First, since QWL is a value-based, organization-wide phenomenon, the use of external people needs to be co-ordinated in an organization-wide way. For example, having different people, with possibly different values and/or orientations to QWL, consulting to different levels or activities within the overall QWL process can be harmful if not handled with sensitivity and skill.

A related issue is the extent of the contact between an external consultant and the overall QWL process. An external person can be more effective in facilitating the change process if she or he has some form of access to direct information from many levels and areas within the organization. This definitely does not mean, however, that she or he needs to work with all key people or all groups, or to attend all meetings. It simply means that internal people need to be sensitive to the value of having the external consultant stay in touch with the overall QWL process as it develops.

Problems are likely to occur if the consultant is strictly limited to contact with only one group or one or two individuals inside the organization (for example, the Steering Committee and/or the internal QWL resource people). At best, the benefits possible from having access to a more 'objective' overall perspective will be lost. At worst, an exclusive relationship increases the chances of unconscious 'collusion' (characterized by either collaboration or conflict) between the external consultant and a single perspective within the process. This can misdirect a lot of energy and cause disturbances in the system.

Deciding how and where to start

The question of how and where to begin the actual redesign can be answered in many ways. Several quite different strategies are possible. It is possible to start with the whole organization, with a particular level within the organization (e.g., supervisors and stewards) with one or several sites (e.g., Department X, or Departments X and Y), or even with a key organization policy and/or structure (e.g., the discipline policy, or the structures for handling quality control).

Whatever the decision, the choice of how or where to start the redesign will affect the kinds of changes which will be possible. For example, if the redesign is started within one functional area of a plant or office (such as assembly or finance), it can be quite

difficult to even consider changes which by their very nature deal with issues which cross areas (such as maintenance schedules or costing procedures).

It is crucial that people do not confuse QWL with whatever might be, for very practical purposes, the particular starting point of redesign. If the distinction between goals and specific objectives is not clear in the minds of at least the leaders, it is possible to get stuck in a fairly narrow form of change. For example, if a decision is made to begin by focusing on the roles of supervisors and stewards, there is the risk that what started as a broadly focussed change process might unconsciously become a 'program' to improve supervisor-steward relations. Care should be taken to avoid this form of 'encapsulation.'

In choosing the best start-up strategy, consideration must be given to available resources, to short-term needs to demonstrate results and to long-term needs with respect to diffusing and sustaining the process. The strategy which to date has been used most often is to start redesign in one particular area, or site, within the organization.

A common mistake at the start of a QWL redesign is to stretch limited resources too thin. For example, a Steering Committee in an enthusiastic attempt to prove that QWL can work anywhere, may decide to start in the most difficult site in the organization. While this strategy does have some advantages, it may also have the fatal disadvantage of applying the least amount of skill and experience to the toughest problems.

Critical factors

Experience has shown that the following qualities in a site enhance its chances for success, in both the short and the long-term:

- strong, secure local leadership within both union and management
- a positive relation between local union and management that is based on a relative balance of power between the parties
- sufficient opportunities within the site for changes which can benefit all groups in the area
- sufficient authority within the site to make changes of significance
- credibility within the organization — the site should be seen by people outside of it as an important part of the operation, and
- a history of positive relations with other areas, which could provide a basis for the site to begin to explore broader changes in conjunction with these areas.

There is also growing evidence that it is wise to concentrate at least some resources at the start of the redesign on a change that is organization-wide. The problems of encapsulation and diffusion can be so great that serious efforts should be made as soon as possible to achieve some benefits which can be enjoyed by as many people as possible. For example, changes that are consistent with QWL can be made in general policies and practices in such areas as discipline, health and safety, performance evaluation and promotion, quality control, scheduling, etc. Whenever resources allow, it is a good idea to start the redesign with a multiple approach that supports some form of change at both the site level and the total organization level.

At either level, special attention should be given to other changes planned for the organization which could provide a natural opening for redesign according to the principles of quality of working life. Opportunities for QWL could be presented by such things as the introduction of a new technology or of a new product line, a management reorganization, or the review of something such as the job classification system, etc.

Approaching potential participants

The key point here is not to rush the process. People must be given sufficient time and space to explore the quality of working life concept on their own terms. And they must be given the real option to say 'no.'

The understanding and commitment of the people who will be actively involved in the process is essential. In order to achieve these, potential participants need to believe that there is something in QWL for them. They need to feel comfortable that their concerns are respected and will be dealt with and they need to know that it is they who are responsible for deciding whether or not to proceed.

Union and management leaders must play an important but difficult role at this point. They need to lead and encourage without overwhelming people. For example, they have to share what they have learned about QWL without closing off people's own exploration of its meaning.

The Steering Committee must be able to explain not just what the QWL guidelines are, but also why they are. And they need to be open to challenges from the people who may have to work with those guidelines. It is at this point in the QWL process when the guidelines begin to come alive.

Open dialogue

The discussions between the people leading the overall process and the potential participants should be as open and as direct as possible. Care should be taken to talk about possible difficulties, as well as possible benefits. The Steering Committee needs to be as open about boundaries as it is about opportunities. The discussions also need to deal not only with general principles, but also with feasible, concrete applications of those principles.

Leaders need to demonstrate optimism and commitment, not missionary passion. It is important that potential participants be given as much information as possible about what they can realistically expect within a quality of working life process.

Careful use should be made of local site leaders at this point. They are key people and their leadership should be respected. Supervisors and union stewards, for example, need to play a significant part in any process which occurs within their area. However, care should be taken to make sure that QWL does not become identified as the 'pet project' of any particular person or persons.

Once people have had the opportunity to explore the quality of working life idea, there is the question of how they actually decide whether or not to participate in the process. Also, how much agreement within the group is enough to proceed? Ultimately the answer to these questions will depend on local circumstances. Two points, however, are important.

The individual and the group

First, no matter what method is used to reach a final decision, a form of 'group working through' is needed at some point. It is important that each individual in the group has some sense not only of what other individuals think and feel, but also of what the group as a total entity thinks and feels. Participation in a QWL process is not solely an individual act and the process of deciding whether or not to participate should reflect this reality. In fact, if the group is small enough, it is best to make the decision by group consensus.

The second point has already been emphasized earlier—it is unlikely that there will be an absolute yes or no from any group. Unanimous consent is an unrealistic goal. The question then is: what to do with the people who do not want to participate?

Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this question. As a general rule, if at all possible, a person's wish not to participate should be respected. Care should be taken to ensure that the group does not force its will on an individual.

There are, however, cases where non-participation is not feasible. The most obvious case is where people in key positions do not want to participate. It is usually unrealistic to think that a process can succeed without the support of key people. Their non-participation, and probable resistance (whether conscious or unconscious), will make any significant change almost impossible. In such situations, there may be few options other than not proceeding with the process in that area, or moving the person to another part of the organization.

There are also certain changes which do require participation by all members of a group, such as changes in the hours of work or the establishment of a self-regulating, multi-skilled work group. Wherever possible, attempts should be made to introduce change in such a way that individuals can learn to live with the change at their own pace and in their own way.

Setting up structures for redesign

The very meaning of QWL has important implications for the kinds of structures which are appropriate for QWL redesign. The ultimate goal of quality of working life is to find more effective and democratic ways to arrange tasks into jobs and to distribute decision-making powers and responsibilities. The aim, therefore, is to change the structures within an organization. The goal of QWL is not merely to add on new structures to the existing system in order to allow for participation, or problem-solving, or communications, etc.

It is important to appreciate the difference between temporary, or transitional structures and permanent 'add-on' (or what are often called 'parallel') structures. At some point in a QWL process it is usually necessary to establish some new structures beyond the existing ones (e.g., a shop-floor task force to examine the distribution of work in an area). It should be clear from the start, however, that these structures are to be temporary. People need to remember that the goal is to change the basic way of doing things so that shop-floor participation in important issues (such as the distribution of work) becomes an on-going part of the organization. If this is not clear, a change process could result in the creation of a second bureaucracy within a bureaucracy. Or it could deteriorate into a pleasant, but insignificant alternative system which does provide opportunities for participation and learning to an elite few, but does nothing to improve the day-to-day reality of the majority.

The establishment of a structure below the senior management and union level (i.e., the Steering Committee level) is a significant step. The passing down of additional powers and responsibilities to people lower in the hierarchy is often the first test of whether senior people are themselves prepared to practice the principles of QWL.

Choice and structure

Different forms of redesign structures are possible and different forms will probably be appropriate at various times in the same process. The choice of structure will depend on such things as the objectives of the overall QWL process, the nature of the existing structure, characteristics of the particular site (size, technology, relation with other sites, etc.), the nature of power relations within the organization and within the site, etc. The role and mandate of redesign structures will also vary considerably.

The existing structure can be used as the basis for redesign by adding new purposes, powers and processes to existing roles and relationships. For example, a supervisor and a steward can be given joint responsibility for co-ordinating a participative process whereby everyone in their area can explore ways of applying QWL principles in their operation. The only task forces needed would be for very specific purposes (e.g., to gather data on a ventilation system). This approach is likely to work best within a relatively small or compact group.

Over time (with training and support, if needed) the supervisor, the steward and the group will develop new skills and become comfortable with and effective in handling new responsibilities. There will be a significant, on-going change in the roles of supervisor and steward, in the steward-supervisor relationship, and in the nature of the interaction between supervisor, steward and the group as a whole. The old structure will have been replaced by a new, participative one.

A second, more common option is to create a special temporary structure within a particular area of the organization. Such a structure is often called a Redesign Task Force and its broad role is usually to help implement the principles and objectives of the overall QWL process within the area it represents. Depending on the size of the area, the Task Force usually has from five to twelve members.

One of the main tasks of the Redesign Task Force is to oversee a process whereby general objectives (e.g., interesting and challenging jobs) can be operationalized as specific proposals for

change (e.g., doing away with the boundaries between ordering, receiving and quality control in a warehouse). How this task is handled will depend on the mandate of the Task Force.

In order to operate effectively, a Redesign Task Force will need to know what is within and what is beyond its realm—what tasks it is expected to handle; what resources, including information, does it have access to; what decision-making powers does it have; etc. Although in reality the answer to these questions may be quite imprecise, the organization and, specifically, the Steering Committee should try to address them before the Task Force is established. Some clarity on these questions will be needed in order to get the right people on the Task Force and in order to give the Task Force a basis to begin operation.

Once the Task Force begins to work and the QWL process continues to unfold, the role and mandate of the Task Force should evolve naturally as a function of on-going interactions between the Task Force, the Steering Committee, the people within the redesign area, and the organization overall. One point, however, should be clear from the start—a QWL Redesign Task Force should not be seen as a general problem-solving structure set-up to deal with whatever happens to interest its members.

The right people

It is very important to have the right people on the QWL Redesign Task Force. It is a sure sign of trouble if strong people within the area do not want to be on the Task Force. Certain people, by virtue of their formal positions (such as supervisors and stewards) need to be directly involved in the process and should either be on or be represented on (if their numbers are too great) the Redesign Task Force. The remaining members are usually chosen via some form of representative peer selection (e.g., a section-by-section vote).

Ideally, the members of the Task Force will be people with credibility and influence. They will be roughly representative of all levels and groupings within the area and they will be competent and open-minded people. They will be leaders. Recruitment of such people for the Redesign Task Force is rarely a problem when the key people from both union and management within the organization clearly communicate, through words and actions, the importance of the QWL process.

Clarifying relationships

Finally, relationships need to be clarified between the Task Force and the Steering Committee, between the Task Force and other representative union, management, or union-management groups (e.g., a joint health and safety committee, a supervisory council, a union employee counselling group, etc.), and between the Task Force and the area as a whole. It is important that a QWL Redesign Task Force does not either become isolated from the rest of the organization and begin to act as a new form of elite, or overstep its boundaries and begin to take on the tasks of other groups.

Creative ways need to be found to help keep the above relationships clear and open. Some overlapping memberships, especially between the Steering Committee and the Redesign Task Force, can be very useful. It is not enough that the internal and/or external resource people interact with both groups. Some regular, direct contact between 'fully invested' members of the groups is essential.

With respect to the relation between the Task Force and the actual QWL redesign area, it is important that the Task Force remain in close contact with and accountable to the people it represents. Direct contact between the Task Force as an entity and the area as a whole is vital. The regular posting of the agenda and minutes of Task Force meetings is necessary, but not sufficient. It is also necessary to develop ways for more people from the area to be actively involved in the redesign process. This can be done through special, more open events, ad hoc groups to deal with specific issues, or some sort of rotating attendance at Task Force meetings. However, stability is also important and any rotation system needs to take this into account.

It is also important that there be some way for people to express dissatisfaction with either the Task Force as a whole or its individual members. A commonly acceptable process needs to be established whereby groups can change their representative if they feel she/he is not representing their interests. For example, in some cases it might be appropriate for Task Force members to be chosen for a specified term, after which time their mandate would have to be renewed by the group as a whole.

Analyzing the current system and implementing change

This stage in the change process is not something which occurs over months, but years. The actual analysis and implementation involves everyone in a tremendous amount of learning. It can often put intellectual, emotional and psychological stress on individuals, on groups and on the organization as a whole. Everyone must be prepared to commit time, patience and support to the process.

When managers, union representatives and shop or office floor people are brought together to analyze their operation and make suggestions for change, they are all faced with an unfamiliar task. Although people at all levels in an organization have valuable knowledge about the organization, very few ever have the opportunity to see the organization as a whole. Only a small number of people in traditional settings even get to see the whole of a major part of the operation. Most people's experience is confined to a relatively small area.

When people are brought together to consider the redesign of total systems, they do not automatically know how the organization ought to be changed. The group usually begins as a collection of individuals each with a preferred set of solutions to a limited set of problems, as defined through a particular perspective. Learning to work as an effective unit on complex issues is an exciting challenge.

Moral courage

It is a challenge that requires the development of many abilities—the ability to work together as a group; the ability to work with new, often difficult information in a systematic analysis of complex problems; the ability to listen to and learn from people who have different views; the ability to make oneself understood by others; the ability to create a logical argument and to present it effectively; the ability to deal constructively with conflict; and the ability to live comfortably with both failure and success. In addition, any group working to develop suggestions for change must stay in continuous interaction with the rest of the organization. It is easy to understand why analysis and implementation is difficult and takes so long.

One key to success in QWL is the ability to accept and respect the complexity and the difficulty of the process while still maintaining the vision and commitment needed to continue in the pursuit for real change. This ability has often been called moral courage.

Analysis and implementation need to be seen as both connected and separate activities. With issues which are relatively straightforward (e.g., the establishment of a rest area), analysis and implementation are essentially one simple, continuous process. There is usually not much debate about what the issue is, nor about what needs to be done and there is rarely any resistance to implementing any suggested change.

Many issues, however, are not straight-forward. In many situations the true nature of the issue itself is debatable, many alternative responses exist and there are many reasons why change might be difficult to implement. Consider, for example, the question of how responsibilities should be divided between a work group and a supervisor, or the question of how to fairly and effectively distribute 'good' and 'bad' tasks within a group of workers. Such questions require both a process of careful, systematic problem analysis and a process of implementation where everyone involved participates in deciding how to deal with the situation.

There is the danger within a QWL process that people will try to use the same structures and the same processes for dealing with quite different kinds of issues. The QWL Steering Committee and the Redesign Task Force (or whatever structure has been established to handle the redesign) need to address this possibility directly. They need to work out ways for building flexibility into their structures and they need to develop processes which will enable them to deal with a wide variety of issues.

Learning together

Specifically, the Redesign Task Force needs to understand where it has responsibility for both analysis and implementation; where it has responsibility for analysis and recommendation, but must go elsewhere for the power to implement; and where it has responsibility only for analysis. The Task Force also needs to know where it has to go for the powers it does not have (for example, the Steering Committee, senior management, the union executive, the redesign area as a whole) and it must learn how to best present itself before the various groups. For example, senior management may only want to look at the 'bottom line' on one specific recommendation, whereas the redesign area as a whole may want to examine the overall analysis of the issue and the pros and cons of several alternatives.

In reality, it will often not be possible for the above powers and relationships to be clearly defined. The Steering Committee and the Redesign Task Force will only be able to deal with these questions if they are able to work together in order to learn together which structures and processes are most appropriate for each situation.

The Steering Committee and the Task Force also need to develop ways of dealing with people's inevitable frustration with the slowness of the change process. The danger here is that, under pressure to show quick results ('to prove that QWL can work'), people may be pushed into dealing superficially with complex problems. Other options must be found. One possibility is to identify a number of fairly straightforward problems which can be dealt with immediately. Another more difficult, but ultimately more effective option, is for the Task Force to put considerable effort into operating in an open manner. The more people are aware of and involved in what is happening, the more they will appreciate how complex the redesign process actually is.

There are other reasons why it is essential for the Redesign Task Force to be very open throughout the analysis and implementation stage. For example, because the Task Force becomes so much more deeply involved in the QWL process at this point, it is not uncommon for it to begin to get 'out of step' with the rest of the organization, including the Steering Committee and the redesign area.

Members of the Task Force, and the Task Force as a whole, need to take the fact that they are acting as representatives very seriously. An on-going, two-way exchange of information between the Task Force and the area it represents is essential if the Task Force is to maintain its right to represent the area and if the area as a whole is to be able to learn and grow with the Task Force. If this joint learning does not occur, then it is likely that the people in the redesign area will eventually reject the Task Force.

Interactions between the Task Force and the Steering Committee also need to be characterized by joint learning. Contacts based on the old boss-subordinate model of monitoring and approval are not appropriate. If the Steering Committee and Task Force (or Task Forces where more than one area in an organization are involved in redesign) cannot learn to interact as equals involved in a complex learning process, then the whole QWL process will suffer for it.

Limits to training

As was emphasized at the start of this section, there are many difficult challenges to be met in the analysis and implementation stage of QWL. The people most directly involved in the process, in particular the members of the Redesign Task Force and of any other ad hoc working groups, will need support.

Training in a variety of areas (e.g., how to run an effective meeting, group decision-making, socio-technical systems analysis, etc.) may be necessary. However, it is important to time and present the training carefully. People benefit very little from training until they are ready for it. In the early phases of a redesign process, people (especially managers) often react with anger to any suggestion that they do not already have the skills needed to deal effectively with the redesign of their operation.

It is also important not to over-emphasize what can be accomplished by training. It is not uncommon for people who have a little experience with QWL to argue that if only more and better training could be provided, the process would be so much easier. While training most certainly would help with some difficulties, there are many more where training would be of little use. How much can you 'train' someone to open their mind to a totally different perspective from their own, to relinquish power they have always held close to their ego, to bear the disappointment of a good idea that failed, or to accept that differences of values and interest are real and, hence, that trade-offs and imperfections are inevitable in every system? These kinds of changes have to be lived and learned. There is no way to make them easy.

6

Stage three: sustaining the process

The challenges involved in keeping quality of working life alive and growing are quite different than those experienced during the exploration and initial implementation stages. Experience has shown that even a process that begins with great enthusiasm can, over a few years, fade away. Serious problems can develop slowly without any dramatic warning signals. If a QWL process dies, it is not likely to die with a bang, but with a whimper.

In order to sustain a quality of working life process, therefore, it is important to be conscious about what is happening through all stages of its development. In particular, people need to consider carefully how decisions made in earlier stages of the process might ultimately affect its survival. This is especially true in the kinds of situations where trade-offs might have to be made between short-term benefits and long-term survival (for example, the situation where decisions are being made about how quickly and under what conditions to pass down decision-making powers from a supervisor to a work group).

In addition to looking at the QWL process from a broad time perspective, it is also necessary to consider it from a broad organization perspective. Both management and union need to look at whether a whole range of decisions they make are consistent with quality of working life. Ultimately, QWL must be part of a total organization strategy, for both union and management, in order for it to survive.

Maintaining commitment

Commitment at all levels in the organization, within both union and management, is essential in every stage of a QWL process. However, in order to sustain QWL, it is not enough simply to maintain the commitment of earlier stages; the nature and meaning of commitment must grow as the process itself grows.

Commitment at the start-up stage means believing in a set of values and being willing to take the risk of trying to apply those values to one's own organization. During the redesign stage, it is

more a matter of actually making the investment in time, money and energy required by the QWL process and then living with the uncertainty of change.

Sustaining a QWL process, however, means being committed enough not only to deal with the difficulties of change, but more importantly, to live with the imperfections or costs which are an inherent part of any system.

The visions that guide a QWL process during its early stages are, almost by necessity, idealistic. People would not be motivated to change if they did not have fairly high expectations for a better future. Yet in practice these ideals are never completely realized; expectations are never fully met. In addition, quality of working life is not a promise of perfection. Non-bureaucratic structures and democratic processes have costs (such as the amount of time and degree of interpersonal skill required for participative decision making), as well as substantial benefits. Real commitment means believing in the benefits enough to be willing to live with the costs.

Taking stock

One way to help maintain commitment is to have periodic sessions where union and management, both alone and together, 'take stock' of what they have done and of where they are now. Stocktaking sessions should be designed to allow for open interaction amongst people from different levels and different areas in the organization. It is also often a good idea to include some people who have not had much direct involvement in the QWL process. If possible, it is better to hold such sessions off-site, away from the day-to-day demands of the workplace.

People need to be given the opportunity to share and reflect on their varied experiences with QWL and to work through a common understanding of future directions. In addition, when key people voluntarily 'go public' inside their organization about their experiences, hopes and fears concerning QWL, it can help other people to understand better what they themselves have been through. It can help them to cope with their own hopes and fears, and it can lessen the feelings of isolation and uncertainty which often accompany change.

The maintenance and growth of commitment can also be supported by having people share their experiences around QWL with other organizations. The process of 'telling one's story' enables people not only to clarify the meaning of the experience for themselves, but also to appreciate the significance of what they have achieved. When you have to deal continually with day-to-day struggles and disappointments, it is often difficult to see what actually is being accomplished.

Diffusing the process

QWL is a total organization concept. The goal of QWL change is total organization redesign. In addition, it is much easier for change to survive if it becomes organization-wide.

If one part of an organization begins to get a lot of attention and then to look and behave differently, this can breed feelings of suspicion, jealousy and hostility in the rest of the organization. If left to grow, these feelings may lead people who are not yet directly involved in the QWL process to reject, isolate or even attack the innovative area. Rumours begin to fly, people become uncooperative in their relations with the QWL area, and QWL starts to get blamed for all sorts of unrelated problems in the organization. Unfortunately, people within the QWL area can sometimes contribute to the problems by unconsciously beginning to see themselves as special — a kind of elite group.

One way to help alleviate at least some of the problems associated with diffusion is to begin the process in two or three sites at the same time. Another useful approach is to start with a more intense QWL effort in one or two sites, while at the same time attempting to make some QWL-related changes which will apply to the organization as a whole (e.g., removing time clocks or moving to a non-punitive discipline system). Some organizations have even attempted to change their whole operation at once. Most managements and unions, however, do not have the necessary resources or feel comfortable enough to begin a QWL process on a very large scale. Tradeoffs must usually be made between the problems of diffusion and the problems of spreading one's resources too thin.

Starting early

Because the 'rejection reaction' usually develops fairly quickly and is often very strong, the issue of diffusion should be addressed early in the QWL process. Attention must be paid to the relation between the QWL site and the rest of the organization right from the start of redesign. Diffusion should definitely not be delayed until the first site has unconditionally 'proven' itself.

Another major reason why diffusion should begin early has to do with the fact that QWL is not a recipe for specific changes in practices or structures. It is an approach reflecting a set of values and principles. Diffusion, therefore, is not a matter of simply spreading specific changes (such as a job system where people do their own quality control). Diffusion means expanding a process which gives everyone in all areas enough time and space to work through the meaning and implications of QWL values and principles for their own operation. Successful diffusion requires that learning occur throughout the total organization.

If the diffusion process is not started early, when negative reactions such as those mentioned above do begin to occur, the organization may find itself in a very difficult position. On the one hand, attempts to protect the QWL area(s) will require extra resources and will probably cut the QWL area(s) off even more from the rest of the organization. On the other hand, attempts to force QWL in areas which have not yet prepared themselves for change will only increase the chances of even greater resistance.

Establishing systems for ongoing evaluation and redesign

The major purpose of evaluation within QWL is to deepen everyone's understanding of the process in which they are involved. This understanding is invaluable if people are to continually develop quality of working life as an integral part of the growth and development of their organization.

It is unrealistic in any process to expect everything to work exactly as planned. It is not a sign of failure or of backing down on QWL to change plans or strategies that just are not working. The important thing is that all changes remain true to basic QWL values and principles.

It is also unrealistic to expect people to continue in a change process for a sustained period of time without some positive feedback from their efforts. Even the most committed people have needs for periodic signs of concrete accomplishment.

The quality of working life approach recognizes that commitment, design, action and evaluation are interwoven activities. Evaluation should indicate both what is working and what is not working. This, in turn, should lead to renewed commitment, redesign, new action and further evaluation.

Different principles

However, quality of working life is based on fundamentally different values, principles and processes than those of traditional job and organization design. It is not, therefore, appropriate to apply traditional evaluation principles and methods to quality of working life.

Traditionally, evaluation inside organizations has been based on the same principles as is scientific management — everything is broken down into its simplest pieces and then given to a specialist to handle. Only quantifiable information is considered and emphasis is placed on obtaining hard measures of bottom

line concerns such as productivity, scrap rate, etc. Baselines are established, specific targets are set and measures are taken at predetermined, regular intervals.

The evaluators are usually technical experts and/or senior managers. Supervisors and workers are sometimes treated almost like objects—their only involvement in the process is as the passive recipient of either the rewards or punishments that often follow on the results of the evaluation.

In contrast, within QWL evaluation is based on the principles of learning, active participation and shared responsibility. Since quality of working life has to do with organizational effectiveness, with the quality of many different relationships and with the quality of individual personal experiences, a wide range of information is needed in its evaluation. Hard, quantitative data is required, especially by managers who are accountable for the economic realities of the organization. However, much of what is important in QWL is not quantifiable. Information must also be collected on subjective experiences and impressions. In some cases it is also useful to collect data on actual behaviours and feelings in specific incidents of critical importance (e.g., what happens in a discipline or grievance case, or in the introduction of a new piece of technology).

Ongoing monitoring

The evaluators within QWL are the participants in the QWL process—the people who must live with the change and make it work. They must take as much responsibility for evaluation as they do for planning and implementation. The idea of an outside 'objective' evaluation is not appropriate. Management, union and workers must decide what needs to be evaluated; how, when and by whom the evaluation will be done, and how the results of the evaluation will be used.

It is important that the people doing the evaluation also have a good understanding of the tools used in collecting data. This is necessary in order for them to decide what information is really needed. It will also enable them to work with the data to make it fit the wide variety of evaluation needs that will arise—both from within and outside the organization.

Since the understanding gained through evaluation is needed to help direct and redirect the QWL process, it is important to develop structures and procedures for monitoring as soon as possible. It is also essential that the monitoring become a part of every-day practice and, therefore, an on-going, integral part of the QWL process itself.

Making adjustments (i.e. on-going redesign) can deepen people's appreciation of the nature of the QWL process and increase their confidence that things will not get out of control. It is important, however, not to react too quickly to short-term negative feedback. There is often a 'period of adjustment' following a change where both hard and soft measures may take a temporary dip before people learn to make the new system work.

Tension, confusion and dissatisfaction need not be signs that something is not working. They may be signs that people are effectively working through an important, but difficult issue (e.g., the redistribution of decision-making power between a middle manager, supervisor and work group). Careful judgment is required when trying to decide whether a situation requires patient nurturing or more basic redesign.

Adapting support systems

Every organization has a range of systems (formal and informal) which support the basic values and goals of the organization by making sure that everything is working as it should. For example, there are systems for hiring employees, for providing orientation and training (social and technical), for ensuring that people behave in a manner consistent with the company's goals, for allocating resources (money, materials, manpower, etc.) and for handling the relation between union and management. In order for a QWL process to survive, it is essential that these support systems be adapted to fit the new values and goals reflected within quality of working life.

Training systems are key support systems. Managers at all levels, the union executive and stewards, internal QWL resource people, staff support people in critical functions (personnel, finance, industrial engineering, etc.) and the workers all will need to develop new knowledge and new skills in order to work effectively within a new system. It is unfair to expect people to develop new attitudes and behaviours, and sometimes even new roles, without support.

New approaches

The content and design of training programs should be consistent with quality of working life. Effective training requires a system which can identify needs on an ongoing basis and provide the appropriate training. The nature of any training will depend on the stage of the QWL process and the development of the individual or group. Some training will be done jointly by union and management; some will be separate.

The orientation and training of new people as they join the organization is also important as one way of introducing them to the values and principles, goals, structures and practices of the quality of working life process.

Internal 'control' systems (e.g., organizational rewards and punishments) can also have a significant effect on the survival of QWL in an organization. Rewards can be both monetary and non-monetary. Non-monetary rewards such as opportunities to participate in decision-making and to develop new skills are certainly of value in themselves. However, it is only fair, and may be key to helping sustain the process, that the formal reward system (e.g., pay, performance appraisal, promotions, etc.) also change to reflect increases in people's skill level, responsibility and performance.

The systems for controlling undesirable behaviour should also be adapted to the values and principles of QWL. Authoritarian discipline systems are not consistent with a process based on respect for individuals as mature, responsible adults.

Collective bargaining

One of the most important formal systems affecting whether a QWL process will survive and grow is the collective bargaining system. The collective agreement both contains many of the rules governing support systems in an organization (e.g., hiring, discipline, pay and benefits, etc.) and is in itself a fundamental expression of the relation between union and management. As changes occur in the support systems and in union-management relations, it may be necessary to make some changes in both the collective agreement and the collective bargaining process.

The traditions of collective bargaining, however, are a fundamental part of work in our society. Most collective agreements in existing organizations have deep roots in the economic and cultural history of the organization. The relation between quality of working life and collective bargaining must be dealt with, but it must be dealt with in a way that does not violate the basic rights which have been won by workers through collective bargaining.

Supporting change within management and union

In conclusion, a point which has been made throughout the paper needs clarification and emphasis. Not only do union and management need to work together on many joint issues throughout the development of the QWL process, they each

also need to work alone. Within QWL many things change which fundamentally affect the basic internal characteristics of both management and union.

The nature of 'management' is different within quality of working life. Fundamental shifts have to occur within the total management system in order to enable and sustain the expression of different values throughout the organization. The change process can put stress not only on individual managers, but also on management overall.

New concepts, new roles

QWL means that management roles will change—from the first-line supervisor, to the plant or office manager and eventually on to the Chief Executive Officer. Lines of control and accountability will change and will often be unclear. Internal power distributions within the management systems will be altered. Power struggles, across levels, and across departments, may be accentuated. Relationships between management and key groups such as stockholders, suppliers, customers and competitors will also be affected by QWL.

Management as a system needs to work through the meaning of these changes, both with the union and within itself. Managers as a group need to be able to deal openly with their aspirations and concerns and work together to develop new roles and responsibilities in a supportive environment. For example, many organizations involved in QWL have found it useful to create a special temporary structure for supervisors. This supervisors' group provides individuals with an opportunity to work together to examine 'what's in it' for them as a distinct group. It also can provide supervisors with opportunities to develop not only new skills and abilities, but also a new understanding of what it means to be a supervisor.

Quality of working life will also challenge the union as an organization and individual union leaders. Making changes through any process other than collective bargaining is very difficult for a union. Since the collective bargaining process and the collective agreement give workers as a group the only legal power they have over much of what happens in the workplace, the union must protect the collective agreement. In practice, this can mean that changes, particularly changes in the area of job redesign, are sometimes difficult to achieve because of tightly worded contract clauses.

The part and the whole

Special problems also develop for the union where the redesign process focusses on only a part of the organization. The union is responsible for all its members and must be concerned with equality of conditions across the whole organization. If one area proposes a redesign that is dramatically different from what is happening elsewhere, it is often the union that will oppose the change. It is usually the union that takes on the difficult but necessary responsibility of speaking on behalf of interests of the whole over those of a particular group.

The QWL process may affect the union in other ways. For example, the creation of self-regulating work units with group integrity may raise concerns with respect to organization-wide solidarity.

The union also needs to develop its own internally controlled processes for working through the meaning of QWL for itself. This is especially important because of the nature of the union as a democratic organization. The union needs to become involved in a tremendous amount of internal information sharing and participative decision-making.

The union needs to work consciously on improving its own structures and practices as the quality of working life process evolves. The roles and responsibilities of stewards will change with QWL. More important, however, are the many changes which will occur as union members come to accept greater participation as a way of life. The expectations and skills which people develop on their jobs will automatically spill over into other roles they hold in the workplace. The union must be prepared for the exciting challenge of an active, capable and responsible membership.



7

Concluding remarks: living with a new kind of organization

In the early stages of a QWL process, most change occurs in a conscious, conspicuous and sometimes painful manner. As the process continues, however, change begins to occur unconsciously, without notice. Slowly, seeking for new ways to do things better becomes a normal part of life.

It is important to stress again that quality of working life should not be seen as a promise of paradise. QWL values and principles will lead to fundamentally different organizations that will be both more humane and more effective. They will, however, not be problem-free.

In the end, management, union and workers within each organization must decide for themselves whether they are willing to accept the new set of problems, as well as the new benefits and achievements that come with the new organization.

If a QWL process is sustained, eventually there will come a time when quality of working life is no longer thought of as an innovation. QWL values and principles will spread to all areas of the organization and more and more of the support systems and the policies and practices of both union and management will become consistent with these values. The organization as a whole will become a different place.

8 References and further readings

Bluestone, I. 'Workers Have Brains Too', *Workplace Democracy* (Vol. IX, No. 4, Summer 1982)

Cherns, A. *Diffusing QWL*. Paper prepared for the National Conference for QWL Facilitators (Western Conference: Vancouver, 1978)

Davis, L. and Taylor, J. *Design of Jobs* (2nd Edition, Goodyear: Santa Monica, CA, 1979)

Elden, J. 'Political Efficacy at Work: The Connection between More Autonomous Forms of Workplace Organization and a More Participatory Politics,' *The American Political Science Review* (Vol. LXXV, No. 1, March 1981)

Emery, F. (ed.) *The Emergence of a New Paradigm of Work* (Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University: Canberra, 1978)

Goodman, P. 'The Rushton Quality of WorkLife Experiment: Lessons to be Learned', in R. Zager and M. Rosow (eds.), *The Innovative Organization* (Pergamon Press: N.Y., 1982)

Goodman, P. and Dean, J. *Why Productivity Efforts Fail*. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association (Los Angeles 1981 and QWL and 80's Conference, Toronto, 1981)

Gustaven, B. 'From Satisfaction to Collective Action: Trends in the Development of Research and Reform in Working Life', *Economic and Industrial Democracy* (Vol. 1, 1980)

Halpern, N. 'Sustaining Change at the Shell Sarnia Chemical Plant', *QWL FOCUS* (Vol. 2, No. 1, May 1982)

Heckscher, C. 'Worker Participation and Management Control', *Journal of Social Reconstruction* (Vol. 1, 1980)

Herbst, P. *Alternatives to Hierarchies* (Martinus Nijhoff: Leiden, 1976)

Herbst, P. 'The Product of Work is People', in L. Davis and A. Cherns (eds.) *The Quality of Working Life Vol. 1* (The Free Press: New York, 1975)

Jenkins, D. 'The Supervisor Solution', *Management Today* (May 1978)

Keidel, R. 'QWL Development: Three Trajectories', *Human Relations* (Vol. 35, No. 9, September 1982)

Ketchum, L. 'How to Start and Sustain a Work Redesign Program', *National Productivity Review* (Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1982)

Klein, L. *New Forms of Work Organization* (Cambridge University Press: London, 1976)

Kolodny, H. and van Beinum H. (eds.) *QWL and the 80's* (Praeger: New York, 1983)

Landen, D. and Carlson, H. 'Strategies for Diffusing, Evolving and Institutionalizing Quality of WorkLife at General Motors', in R. Zager and M. Rosow (eds.) *The Innovative Organization*, (Pergamon Press: New York, 1982)

Lawler, E. and Drexler, J. 'Dynamics of Establishing Cooperative Quality of WorkLife Projects', *Monthly Labour Review* (March 1978)

Lemelin, M. 'Trade Unions and Work Organization Experiments', *Adapting to a Changing World Vol. II*, (Ottawa: Labour Canada, 1981)

Mansell, J. *Dealing With Some Obstacles to Innovation in the Workplace* (Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre: Toronto, 1980)

Michael, D. and Mirvis, P. 'Changing, Erring and Learning', in P. Mirvis and D. Berg (eds.) *Failures in Organizational Development* (John Wiley and Sons: New York, 1977)

Pasmore, W., Francis, C., Haldeman, I. and Shani, A. 'Socio-Technical Systems: A North American Reflection on Empirical Studies of the Seventies', *Human Relations* (Vol. 35, No. 12, 1982)

Reich, R. 'Alternatives: Industrial Evolution', *Democracy* (Summer 1983)

Trist, E. *The Evolution of Socio-Technical Systems* (Ontario Quality of Working Life Centre: Toronto, 1981)

Trist, E. and Dwyer, C. 'The Limits of Laissez-Faire as a Socio-Technical Change Strategy' in R. Zager and M. Rosow (eds.), *The Innovative Organization*, (Pergamon Press: New York, 1982)

Walton, R. 'Establishing and Maintaining High Commitment Work Systems' in J. Kimberly and R. Miles (eds.) *The Organizational Life Cycle* (Jossey-Bass Inc.: New York, 1980)

Walton, R. 'The Diffusion of New Work Structures: Explaining why Success Didn't Take', *Organizational Dynamics* (1975)

Watts, G. 'Management Incentives: Trick or Treat?', *Workplace Democracy* (Vol. IX, No. 4, Summer 1982)

White, B. 'Union Response to the Humanization of Work: an explanatory proposition', *Human Resource Management* (Vol. 2, No. 9, 1975)